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ON

THE PRESENT STATE

OF

EGYPT.

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TRAVELLERS

A LECTURE DELIVERED BY

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TO

N. W. SENIOR, Esq.

THIS LECTURE,

CONSISTING CHIEFLY OF EXTRACTS FROM HIS

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## PRESENT STATE OF EGYPT.

**I**T is not my design to treat of the wondrous antiquities of Egypt; its Hieroglyphics, its Temples, and its Pyramids; nor shall I attempt any description of the extraordinary physical features of the country; one portion of it an unreclaimable desert, another—close bordering on that—of an admirable fertility, almost rainless, but well watered by the Nile.

On these subjects many curious and interesting works have been written, which will well repay perusal; but I think it will also be interesting, and not altogether unprofitable, to bring before you a few brief notices of the political and social condition of the country, its government, and the habits and notions of the people. For, the Egyptian Pyramids do not differ more from our buildings, or the ancient hieroglyphics from our writing, than the Egyptian institutions, and customs, and modes of thought, do from ours.

The particulars which I propose to lay before you are what I have learned from some friends who have lately been residing in Egypt. The great mass of the population of Egypt consists of what are called Fellahin, which is the plural of Fellah. They are Mahometans, and their language is Arabic; but they are believed by all the most competent judges to be a mixed race, partly Arabs and partly Coptic, derived from intermarriages between Arabians and those Copts—the ancient possessors, as is generally believed, of Egypt—who have embraced the Mussulman faith. There are also, on the borders of the desert, many tribes of Bedouins, who are pure Arabs, and are described as differing considerably in features from the above. Then there are Copts, though in no great numbers (about 217,000), who have remained separate, and retain the profession of Christianity



But the Coptic language, in which their Scriptures are written and their religious service performed, is a dead language. There are also in Egypt a few scattered Syrian and Greek Christians and a very small number of Armenians. The Jews are estimated at about 5000, though some estimate them at nearly twice that number; and the Turks, who hold almost all the chief offices, and the greater part of the property, are supposed not to exceed 10,000, out of a total population believed to be about five millions. These speak the Turkish language; and many of them know little or nothing of any other.

The Government, as has almost always been the case with all Oriental nations, is purely monarchical. Egypt is reckoned a portion of the Ottoman Empire, and is governed by a Viceroy. But the Viceroy is something intermediate between an independent sovereign and a provincial governor, and the office is understood to be hereditary. Tribute is paid to the Turkish Sultan and nominally allegiance to him is professed; but the Viceroy, though always a Turk by extraction, if not by birth, governs, in most points, according to his own pleasure, and in some instances has even waged war with the Sultan. Much mutual jealousy almost always prevails; the more, because the terms of the connexion are undefined and uncertain, so that intrigues and counter-manouvres are perpetually going on; the one party wishing to establish a more complete dependence, and the other a more complete independence, of Egypt on Constantinople. But as for any constitutional check on the Ruler's power, for the protection of the subjects' liberty, that is a thing unknown among Orientals.

An absolute monarchy, we, and the people of many other European nations, would probably consider as, on the whole, a bad institution. But there are several points in which the expectations which many persons might be inclined to form respecting such a government would be the reverse of the facts. They might expect it to possess—with all its evils—some advantages which experience shows it does not possess.

For instance, it might naturally be expected that under a despotism, the persons appointed to each office would be, if not really the most fit, yet at least selected as being believed so; the Sovereign having his choice unrestricted by considerations of



parliamentary influence, which, in a representative government, often render necessary the advancement of those whom the Sovereign does not really prefer. And again—an absolute monarchy might—as some would suppose, visit with such summary and severe punishment (though sometimes, perhaps, over-severe) any misconduct of officials, as most effectually to deter from wrong-doing. No one, in short, would be able, it might be thought, to purchase either undeserved promotion, or impunity for abuse of power, by his own or his family's popular influence.

And this was the very argument urged (according to the testimony of several independent witnesses) by a late eminent European Autocrat, to justify his avowed and deep detestation of a constitutional monarchy. A pure republic, it is said, or an absolute king, he did not object to; but a limited regal government, with a popular representation, he considered as the very hot-bed of such corruption as he boasted of being exempt from.

But now, how stand the facts, as reported by all, without exception, who have had opportunities of ascertaining them? There is, in that very empire, more corrupt administration of justice, more peculation, more malversation of every kind, among officials, going on every year, than among us in half a century. And, by the testimony of all travellers, there is in Egypt a still greater amount of all these abuses.

One of the appointments which the Sultan of Constantinople retains in his own hands, is that of the chief Cadi (the head magistrate) of the city of Cairo. It is notoriously sold to the best bidder; and that, from year to year—for he must be annually confirmed in his post. And the Turk who has purchased it comes from Constantinople, quite ignorant, for the most part, of the language of the people whose judge he is to be, and bent on reimbursing himself as amply as possible for his outlay.

Now, let any one consider what would be our condition, if our chief magistrates were sent from France or Spain, quite ignorant of our language, having purchased their offices, and possessing summary jurisdiction without the intervention of a jury.

And the other Officials in Egypt seem, by all accounts, to be intent only on squeezing as much profit as possible out of those placed under them, without the slightest regard to justice or to



humanity. For nothing can be more erroneous than the notion that a despot, though he may himself fleece and oppress his people, will effectually prohibit others from doing so. On the contrary, he is himself continually cheated by his subordinates ; and they plunder and tyrannize over his people.

You are probably aware that it is on canals for carrying the Nile-water for irrigation that the cultivation of Egypt almost entirely depends. A traveller, who remarked the ill-cultivated condition of a certain district, was informed, in reply to his inquiry, that this was from its canal not having been cleaned out for several years. This operation is essential, because else the bed soon becomes choked up with mud. The persons, it seems, whose office it is to see that the canals are duly cleaned out, receive a salary equal to about 50*l.* of our money. But they can make 200*l.* or 300*l.* a-year by taking bribes to report work done that has *not* been done. One inspector was said to have gained two thousand dollars in one year for false reports.

It was proposed to an Egyptian Viceroy to substitute for an immense number of wind-mills which grind corn for his army, a steam-mill which would perform the work at half the cost. But the proposal was not adopted, partly, it seems, because there are about 500 persons employed about the mills, well paid, and with little to do ; and partly because there are a few persons of great influence to whom the existing system is advantageous ; not more than three-quarters of the wheat that is sent to the mills returning. Some part of the profit finds its way as hush-money to the subordinate officers ; but the greater part to those high in office.

Again, it being proposed to make a canal in a place where it was much needed, a person in high office was sent to have the ground inspected, and a report made of the cost. The engineer whom he employed sent in an estimate of 40,000 labourers for two months. But it so happened, in this case, that the scheme of peculation which had been formed was defeated by the inspection of another person in office (sent down on account of suspicions which had arisen), who ascertained that about 6000 workmen could easily complete the work in a fortnight. The engineer admitted this to him, but assured him that he had been ordered to make the estimate he did ; and that he thought



he *might* escape punishment for that falsification, while he was quite certain that if he refused, his destruction was inevitable. Of course the difference between the estimated and the real cost had been designed to go into the pocket of the Commissioner.

All who have the superintendence of public works are authorised to press the Fellahs into the service, at a rate of wages fixed for them, and of which the far greater portion is paid them in kind; that is, in food of the coarsest and worst description; and they are kept to work by overseers, literally under the lash. But these are degrees of cruelty which are generally disapproved by the greater part even of the Turkish Officials. One of them was asked, on one occasion, by another, who was on a visit to him, whether the report was true which he had heard, of his employing a somewhat novel mode of keeping his workmen in order, by putting them between two boards and sawing them asunder when they displeased him. He replied by owning that he had formerly resorted to that mode, but that he had discontinued it, from finding that it 'did not answer.' The other observed to my informant that he could not have partaken of the man's coffee if he had been pursuing such a course; but that as it seemed he had left it off, he had not scrupled to drink coffee with him.

As for *public spirit*, it is a thing which, under a despotism, is so little looked for, or believed in, that a man who evinces any, is likely to be at once suspected of some secret sinister design. For instance, a person in office, who was desirous of improving the sanitary condition of the people, and who was inclined to attribute much of the prevailing mortality to the *over-crowded* state of the villages, applied to have a return made out of the area and the population of each village. He was immediately dismissed from the then Viceroy's service. It was supposed impossible he could make such inquiries but from some secret evil design of his own.

It might be supposed, however, by some, that, though a despot is not always well served, such a government as that of Egypt would at least have the advantage of complete and prompt *obedience* from the subjects, though its commands might sometimes be harsh; and that there would be nothing corre-



sponding to that evasion or defiance of law, which sometimes occurs in free countries.

But here again the fact is at variance with such an expectation. Those brought up under an arbitrary government, and accustomed to consider that, even with the most blameless conduct, they have no security for their persons or property,—such men are found (1) to regard the government as their natural enemy, which it is right and advisable always to defeat or escape from, when possible; and (2) to become *reckless* of the future;—a future which admits of no certain calculation. And they thence eagerly seize on any *immediate* advantage, and take their chance for what may follow.

One instance, may serve as a specimen of this. A person employed by the Viceroy to construct some docks, told my informant the following anecdote:—

‘When I was making those docks, I found the expense of obtaining Puzzuoli-cement from Italy, considerable. A sample of clay fit for the purpose was brought to me, and I ascertained that it was to be found at Gourés (a village on the Nile). I went thither, sent for the chief man [or Sheich] and told him that I understood that there was in the lands of his village the clay of which I showed him a specimen. His countenance fell, and he assured me that the whole bed had been worked out. I walked over the village, and soon found that the stratum, instead of being exhausted, was, in fact, almost inexhaustible. Half the land belonging to the village consisted of it. Thereupon I ordered him to provide within a fixed time a certain number of bricks. As soon as I heard that they were ready I went to look at them, but found them unburnt.

‘We cannot,’ said the Sheich, ‘burn bricks in this village except when the Nile is at its lowest. At present it fills our kilns. We are forced to send our clay to Upper Egypt, if it is to be burnt.’ I looked at his kilns, and, in fact, they were full of water. But as they stood many feet above the level of the Nile, and the Nile was then increasing, it was obvious that the water had been deposited not by the Nile, but by the *villagers*. It was just the trick of an Egyptian; capable of deceiving a Turk, but no one else.’ ‘You rascal,’ I said, ‘the governor of the



province comes here this evening, and five minutes after you will be hanged before your own door.' These people have no pity themselves, and never believe that they shall be treated with pity. He fully expected to be hanged ; he tore his haich, he covered himself with sand, he threw himself on the ground, he kissed my shoe, and the skirt of my coat ; and when I seized him to raise him up, his hand was icy. I gave him hopes of forgiveness if the bricks were duly burnt. The next day, as I returned from looking at the preparations for heating the kilns, I found my boats full of sheep and calves and fowls. 'They are a present,' said my servant, 'from the Sheich.' He had recourse to the argument which he thought most likely to soften me ; and it was with great difficulty that I made him understand that they must be taken back.

'Were the villagers paid for their work ?' I asked.

'They were *supposed* to be paid,' he answered, but the appointed scale was low, and a great part—perhaps the whole of what they were entitled to—was intercepted in its progress. The treatment of the Israelites in the time of Moses is a fair specimen of the administration which now prevails in Egypt, and probably has prevailed for the last 5000 years. Want of straw, or even want of clay would no more be admitted as an excuse by the officers of the Pasha than it was by the officers of Pharaoh. 'Ye are idle, ye are idle,' would be the answer.

One advantage, however, that of *security*, many would expect to find in a despotic government. In a free country those who are disaffected to the government may be carrying on plots that are strongly suspected, or even sufficiently known, to leave no moral doubt on any one's mind, yet of which no legal proof can be obtained. Or they may keep within the letter of the law in proceedings quite contrary to the spirit of it ; and if a new Act of Parliament be passed to meet the case, they may find some new evasion of the new enactment. In an absolute monarchy, on the contrary, the least suspicion of any design against the ruler's person or power is visited with summary vengeance. And though the innocent are likely often to suffer with the guilty, it might be supposed that the guilty would have no chance of escape, and that all plots would be nipped in the bud.



But the fact is otherwise ; and it confirms the Latin proverb that ‘ He who is feared by many must live in fear of many.’ (*Necesse est multos timeat, quem multi timent.*)

A late Viceroy of Egypt having been found dead in his bed, it was certified by the surgeons appointed to examine the body, that he had died of apoplexy. They are believed to have received instructions to that effect from persons whom they dared not disobey. But few have any doubt that he was smothered by some of his domestics. Two men are pointed out, and well known as the perpetrators—or among the perpetrators—of the deed. But they enjoy perfect impunity, inasmuch as it had been officially and publicly stated that the death was natural. Some believe that only those two persons were concerned ; others say five. And while some attribute the act to threats which the Viceroy had uttered against these men, others think that the assassination was planned by some members of his own family. But amidst all these conflicting opinions, all except a very few agree that assassination did take place.

This man, however, it must be owned, was far beyond the average in point of tyranny. It is reported, that when some of the many palaces he built (for that was his passion) shall be pulled down, there will be fearful revelations made ; for he is commonly believed to have been in the habit of ordering a man to be *built up* within a wall. And it is certain that on one occasion he sewed up with his own hands the mouth of one of the women of his harem, and so left her to die of hunger, for having transgressed an order of his against smoking. He spoke of it himself to the person who told my informant, and who had remarked on his fingers being bloody. It is remarkable, however, that the representations, current in Europe of this monster, were far less unfavourable than what are circulated respecting his successor, a Viceroy about whom there are indeed great differences of opinion, but who is allowed by all to be at least better than the other. The supposed reason of this is, that the one paid, and the other refused to pay, a large stipend to the correspondent of an influential English newspaper. If the editor of a journal be himself inaccessible to bribes, it does not follow that all his foreign agents will be so.



But despots who govern with much less cruelty than the man just mentioned, yet generally govern so as to make their overthrow desirable to a large portion of their subjects. Tax-payers who had not ready money to pay their taxes, but only produce, paid their taxes in kind (and some, I believe, were compelled to pay in kind rather than in money), at a *rate fixed by the collector*, who valued their corn or other produce at about one-half of the market-price. And public creditors, many of them persons whose land had been taken from them with the promise of an annual payment in lieu of it, were paid the *same number* of piastres as had been originally fixed, the piastre meantime having been reduced to less *than a quarter* of its proper value—from about tenpence English, to about nine farthings. The pressing of soldiers, also, is a dreadful hardship to many of the peasants, who have families dependent on their labour for support. My informant one day, seeing a poor woman sobbing bitterly, inquired of her the cause of her grief. She was a widow, with one daughter and one son. On his labour they had subsisted, and he being just carried off to the army, she and her daughter, she said, must starve. When my friend soon after met with a troop of recruits marching to the depôt, he did not wonder to see them *chained* two and two.

Now, people who are thus governed are apt to think (though often very erroneously) that any change is likely to be for the better.

But whatever may be the condition of the *subjects* of an absolute monarchy, the Royal family—*all* its members—many would suppose to be kept in the enjoyment of everything that the present life can bestow. On the contrary, their lives are not safe from one another, and their domestic happiness is cruelly sacrificed. This arises in great measure from the Turkish law of succession, which makes the crown descend, not to the son necessarily of the last sovereign, but to the *eldest* male of the family ; often, therefore, to a brother or a nephew, if there be any older than the Sultan's or Viceroy's son. Hence the well-known practice among the Turkish rulers of cutting off their brothers ; and the total amount of royal infanticide that goes on is what sounds to European ears almost incredible. But it is well



known that a brother or younger son of a Turkish sovereign is to have *no children*. A daughter, indeed, or sister of the sovereign may rear *female* children, but males must be cut off as soon as born. No issue whatever, male or female, is allowed to the brother or younger son. The unnatural law of succession is thus eluded by unnatural expedients.

And of the children of the sovereign himself—often very numerous—not above one in ten, scarcely, perhaps, one in twenty, are reared. They are entrusted from infancy to the care—if such a word as *care* can be so applied—of persons, many of whom either wish them to die, or do not care for them; and they often fall a sacrifice to wilful neglect.

With such a low tone of morality, and so little regard for human life, and without any such reference to public opinion as exists among us, it may easily be understood how unsafe must be the lives of persons of high family or station, and those connected with them. Well authenticated instances indeed of persons who have been secretly made away with, it is, of course, difficult to produce, on account of that very state of things which renders such occurrences probable. It is likely that many cases of this kind which are reported are not true, and that very many more *have* occurred which were hardly at all suspected. Poison, there is no doubt, is not unfrequently resorted to. One instance I know of, in which there is every reason to believe poison to have been administered to a European, who narrowly escaped with life.

The expression is not uncommon of a person's having 'taken a cup of coffee too much.' On every occasion of a visit, coffee is presented, which it would be reckoned uncivil to refuse; and this affords a most favourable occasion for poisoning.

The carelessness about human life and human happiness or suffering which I have just adverted to, is one of the most curious characteristics of Oriental character, especially when contrasted with their scrupulous tenderness towards the brute creation. Bacon, in his *Essay on Goodness* [what in modern language is called 'benevolence'], remarks that it is so essential a part of Man, that when not exercised towards his fellow-men, it finds, as it were, a kind of vent towards other animals. 'The Turks,' says he, 'are a cruel people, but yet they are kind to beasts.' Two



centuries and a half after Bacon's time, this is the statement given to my friend by a resident in Cairo. "The remark that Orientals are not to be judged according to European notions, is so obvious that it has become trite; but on no point is the difference between the two minds more striking than in the respect for life.

The European cares nothing for brute-life. He destroys the lower animals without scruple whenever it suits his convenience, his pleasure, or his caprice. The Mussulman preserves the lives of the lower animals solicitously. I say the *lives*; for they do sometimes ill-use their beasts of burden, though they scruple to *kill* except for food or in self-defence. Though the Mussulman considers the dog impure, and never makes a friend of him, he thinks it sinful to kill him, and allows the neighbourhood, and even the streets, of his towns, to be infested by packs of masterless brutes which you would get rid of in London in one day. The beggar does not venture to destroy his vermin; he puts them tenderly on the ground, to be caught up into the clothes of the next passer-by. There are hospitals at Cairo for superannuated cats, where they are fed at the public expense.

But to *human* life he is utterly indifferent. He extinguishes it with much less scruple than that with which you shoot a horse past his work. Abbas, the last Viceroy, when a boy, had his pastrycook bastinadoed to death. Mohammed Ali mildly reproved him for it, as you would correct a child for killing a butterfly. He explained to his little grandson that such things ought not to be done without a motive."

The slight sketch I have given of an Oriental system of government may perhaps have caused you to doubt how far the poet's assertion is borne out, who says—

‘Of all the various ills that men endure  
How small the part that kings can cause or cure.’

But it would be most unfair to attribute to misgovernment all—or all the most important—of the evils that are to be found in Egypt and in other Eastern countries. A large portion is the result of the gross ignorance and strange superstitions of the



people; and how far—or whether at all—the Government is responsible for that ignorance and ill-education, it would not be easy to decide.

One of the most noxious of their superstitions (as far as regards temporal well-being) is their dread of the *evil eye*. The notion is very widely spread in the East, and very ancient; so as to have given a tinge to popular language. For though there is a Greek word answering to our word ‘envy,’ the New Testament writers generally use the expression of ‘evil eye;’ as for instance ‘Is thine eye evil because I am good?’ *i. e.*, ‘Art thou envious because I am bountiful?’

Bacon, in his *Essay on Envy*, speaks of the notion as prevalent among ourselves in his time, and as one to which he did not altogether himself refuse credence.

‘There be none of the affections,’ he says, ‘which have been noted to fascinate or bewitch, but love and envy: they both have vehement wishes; they frame themselves readily into imaginations and suggestions; and they come easily into the eye, especially upon the presence of the objects; which are the points that conduce to fascination, if any such thing there be. We see likewise, the Scripture calleth envy an evil eye; and the astrologers call the evil influences of the stars evil *aspects*; so that still there seemeth to be acknowledged in the act of envy an ejaculation or irradiation of the eye. Nay, some have been so curious as to note that the times when the stroke or percussion of an evil eye doth most hurt, are when the party envied is beheld in glory or triumph; for that sets an edge upon envy; and besides, at such times the spirits of the persons envied do come forth most into the outward parts and so meet the blow.’ Bacon might have added that the very word ‘invidere,’ from which our word ‘envy’ is derived, signifies originally, casting a hostile look on some one.

‘I once in Cairo,’ said my friend, ‘conversed on this superstition with an intelligent Cairan, who described it as the great curse of his country.

‘Does the mischievous influence of the evil eye,’ he was asked, ‘depend on the will of the person whose glance does the mischief?’



‘Not altogether,’ he answered: ‘an intention to harm may render more virulent the poison of the glance; but envy, or the desire to appropriate a thing, or even excessive admiration, may render it hurtful, without the consciousness, or even against the will, of the offender. It injures most the thing that it first hits. Hence the bits of red cloth that are stuck about the dresses of women, and about the trappings of camels and horses, and the large spots of lampblack on the foreheads of children. They are a sort of conductors. It is hoped that they will attract the glance, and exhaust its venom.’ A fine house, fine furniture, a fine camel, and fine horse, are all enjoyed with fear and trembling, lest they should excite envy and bring misfortune. A butcher would be afraid to expose fine meat, lest the evil eye of passers-by, who might covet it, should taint it, or make it spoil, or become unwholesome.

Children are supposed to be peculiarly the objects of desire and admiration. When they are suffered to go abroad, they are intentionally dirty and ill dressed, but generally they are kept at home, without air or exercise, but safe from admiration. This occasions a remarkable difference between the infant mortality in Europe and in Egypt. In Europe, it is the children of the rich that live; in Egypt, it is the children of the poor. The children of the poor cannot be confined. They live in the fields. As soon as you quit the city, you see in every clover-field a group, of which the centre is a tethered buffalo, and round it are the children of its owner, with their provision of bread and water, sent thither at sunrise, and to remain there till sunset, basking in the sun, and breathing the air from the desert. The Fellah children enter their hovels only to sleep; and that only in the winter. In summer, the days and nights are passed in the open air; and notwithstanding their dirt and their bad food, they grow up healthy and vigorous, except when suffering from ophthalmia, as numbers do. The children of the rich, confined by fear of the evil eye, to the harem, are puny creatures, of whom not a fourth part reaches adolescence. Achmet Pasha Jahir, one of the governors of Cairo under Mohammed Ali, had two hundred and eighty children; only six survived him. Mohammed Ali himself had eighty-seven; only ten were living at his death. ‘I believe,’



he added, 'that at the bottom of this superstition is an enormous prevalence of envy among the lower Egyptians. You see it in all their fictions. Half of the stories told in the coffee-shops by the professional story-tellers, of which the *Arabian Nights* are a specimen, turn on malevolence—malevolence, not attributed, as it would be in European fiction, to some insult or injury, inflicted by the person who is its object, but to mere envy; envy of wealth, or of the other means of enjoyment, honourably acquired and liberally used.'

I ought not to omit mentioning, while on this subject, that a little son of the present Viceroy is placed under the care of an English nurse, with the express stipulation that she is to have the uncontrolled management of him. Accordingly, he is kept clean and well clad, and runs about in the open air, in defiance of the 'evil eye,' to the great astonishment of every one.

This superstition appears to prevail equally among the Mahometans and the Christians. But each class have also some of their own.

The Coptic Patriarch, in a conversation at which my informant was present, complained that his people who were pressed for recruits to the army, were often compelled by their comrades to become Mussulmans against their will, by forcing flesh-meat down their throats on a fast-day. They believed, he said, that this compulsory defilement cut them off finally from the Christian Church; and that they might as well become Mussulmans at once. Why does not your Holiness, it was asked, grant a dispensation for such cases? He answered that he did; but that his people often refused to avail themselves of it. And he mentioned an instance of a sick woman whom the physician had ordered to take nourishing food, as essential to her recovery. The Patriarch permitted and enjoined her to do so; but she persisted in fasting, and died.

It is curious to observe the coincidence between the superstition of these poor people and that of the Hindus, who believe that a man who has a piece of beef forced down his throat, or who is tricked into tasting it, loses caste irretrievably. And the Indian mutineers sedulously spread the false report that the British had a design thus to deprive them of their religion with-



out their own consent. It does not appear that they had any dread of the *missionaries*; because every one is at liberty to listen to them or not, at his own choice. But it certainly would be *possible* for a *Government*—though no British Government would ever have such a thought—to *make* Hindus lose caste, as Tippoo Sahib is said to have done in some instances, without their own consent. That a similar notion should prevail among any denomination of Christians with regard to *their* religion, is what few would have anticipated. If those poor people had been rightly instructed from their childhood, they would have learned, that, though compliance, when practicable, with the rules of their Church in matters originally indifferent, is a duty, ‘the kingdom of heaven,’ as Paul tells the Romans, ‘is not meat and drink but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’

But the Coptic, in which the Scriptures are read to the people is, as I have already mentioned, a dead language, understood by few, if any, of the laity, and very imperfectly, it is said, by many of the clergy.

Among the Mussulmans, one of the most hurtful superstitions is the Mahometan doctrine of *fatalism*. I say the ‘*Mahometan* doctrine,’ because this differs from the complete, consistent fatalism which teaches that *all* things are alike fated, the *means* as well as the *ends*, and which, therefore, does not necessarily exercise any influence on the conduct. It is told of the famous Roman stoic, Cato, that one of his slaves, who was about to be punished for stealing, endeavoured to shelter himself under the stoical doctrine of fatalism, saying that he was fated to be a thief; ‘and to be flogged,’ replied his master. One who believes that the husbandman who is fated to *reap* must have been fated to *sow*, and that he whose destiny is to be idle is destined to starve, who holds that if he is predestined to commit a murder, he is fated to be hanged for it, such a one may be in his conduct uninfluenced by his speculative belief. But Mahomet taught a fatalism independent of human actions. Those who had fallen in a certain battle, he did not describe as predestined to *go* to the battle; but taught that if they had *stayed at home*, they would have dropped down dead at the very same time.

Now it is true indeed that this doctrine is one which no re-



does, or can, carry out in practice *thoroughly* and constantly. No one doing so could live a week ; for he would not move out of the way of an advancing carriage, or sea-tide, but would say, if I am destined to be crushed or drowned, nothing can save me ; and if I am fated to escape, nothing can destroy me. But though no one *constantly* acts on such a principle, many of the Mussulmans do act on it very frequently, when it affords a plea for their habitual indolence and carelessness, or for following any inclination. It is well known how difficult it is to induce them to take the most obvious precautions against infectious diseases and epidemics. And, it was remarked to my informant, in reference to the capture of the important town of Kars, which might easily have been saved if prompt supplies had been sent to it, that the Mussulman plea for the gross neglect shown probably was, 'if Allah wills that Kars shall be taken, nothing we can do will save it, and if it is his decree that it shall stand, it will stand without our exertions.' And he added instances of persons who when a crime was proved against them, calmly replied that it was the 'will of Allah.'

A population, such as that of Egypt at the present day, sunk in the ignorance and superstitions that prevail, could not be at once raised into civilization and prosperity, even by the most just and benevolent and enlightened government.

But there is some hope that increased intercourse with Europeans, caused by the transit line to India, may in time benefit both the rulers and the people, and gradually cause some rays of light to penetrate the gloom, and to dispel some of the intellectual and moral darkness—even 'a darkness that may be felt'—which overspreads the land, like that literal darkness in the days of Moses.

And no doubt such an effect *would* be produced in no long time, and indeed would have been perceptibly produced before now, if the Europeans in Egypt were much more like what Christians ought to be, than, unhappily a large portion of them are. Their vices, and their manifest carelessness about their own religion, constitute one of the greatest hindrances to the improvement of Egypt. Of all the European Christians resident



in that country, the Italians, and still more, the Greeks, are said to bear the worst character. But I grieve to say that not a few of our own countrymen have a heavy share in this awful responsibility. And far worse is the professed Christian who, either in Egypt, or here, is leading an unchristian life—far worse, both in himself, and in the effects of his example on others, than the unenlightened Egyptian or Turk. Worse in himself, because he has had, and has abused greater advantages; and ‘of him to whom much is given, much will be required;’ and more hurtful to others, because it is Gospel truth that his conduct tends to bring into disrepute; even as Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, reproaches some of his countrymen with causing ‘the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles.’

One important advantage to ourselves may be derived, I think, from the contemplation—painful as it is to a generous mind—of such a government as that of Egypt and some other countries. It may lead us to prize as we ought, with contented thankfulness, the blessings of our own Constitution. By ‘content,’ I do not mean that we should abstain from seeking by legitimate means a remedy for any defects we may observe, and aim at no improvements in any department of Government. Indeed, it is one of our chief blessings, and the glory of our constitution, that *legitimate* means are within our reach; that the nation *can* make known its complaints, or wants or wishes, in a better mode than by insurrection or assassination. But I mean that we should not murmur at not having reached a perfection beyond what can reasonably be looked for in any human institution; that we should not complain of *imaginary* grievances, nor exaggerate *real* ones; nor seek to subvert all that is established, because we do not find the earth converted into a Paradise.

If, on the one hand, our Government, with all its faults either in theory, or in the administration of it, be, as some are disposed to think, the best on the whole, or one of the best, that exists, or ever did exist, that is no reason why we should not seek by lawful means to render it still better. And, on the other hand, its falling short of complete perfection, is no reason why we should ungratefully shut our eyes to the benefits we do pos-



ness, and which so many other nations want. To regard indeed with proud and exulting scorn, and hard-hearted self-congratulation, the inferiority, the defects, and the misfortunes of others, this would, no doubt, be most ungenerous. But to dwell with eagerness, with triumphant invective, and with scornful and light-hearted ridicule, on the defects, real or fictitious, of our own constitution, this shows to say the least a very unamiable levity of character, and tends to no good result.

I am alluding particularly to the tendency of some modern writers, such as are noticed in an able article in the *Edinburgh Review* for last July : writers who, with much wit and power of description, find amusement for themselves and their readers in the keen pursuit and exposure of everything faulty, or which can be represented as faulty, in every portion of our whole system ; exaggerating with eager delight every evil they can find, and fixing on it like a raven pouncing on a piece of carrion ; inventing such as do not exist, and keeping out of sight whatever is well done and unexceptionable.

The general drift of such publications is to lead to the conclusion, that with all our boasted institutions and precautions, we are the worst governed people upon earth ; that all our pretensions to justice or wisdom are a mere delusion ; and that our Law-courts, and Parliaments, and Public Offices of every description, are merely a cumbrous machinery for deceiving, and plundering, and oppressing the people.

I am not speaking now of an occasional bitter sarcasm such as may be allowably thrown out in the course of an argumentative work designed to call serious attention to some *particular* abuse, or imminent danger, but of what are avowedly works of amusement, and the *main staple* of which is to hold up all our institutions to ridicule mixed with abhorrence, in a sort of moral pillory.

If a work of this character were put in the way of an Oriental despot (and, for aught I know, this may have actually been done), he would be not unlikely to say—'Since it appears, by your own showing, that, with all the troublesome machinery of judges and juries, Lords and Commons, long pleadings, and long debates, you are utterly misgoverned, and all your public men,



appointed with so many forms and so much care, are continually contriving how to repress merit, and to leave business undone, your best course will be to sweep away all these things as useless incumbrances, and establish an absolute monarchy like mine. With less trouble, matters *might* go on better, and evidently could not, by your own account, go on worse.' And he might add—'One advantage you would certainly gain at once; such a writer as this I have been now reading, if he should presume to write in a similar tone about the new Government, would at once lose his head.' For, during a late Viceroyalty of Egypt, several headless trunks were at one time exhibited in Cairo; each with a label on his breast, declaring that they had made too free use of their tongues. It had been strictly forbidden to *talk about* the war then going on in Syria; and these men had been guilty of telling or of asking news.

Much greater licence is used in *this* country, wretchedly enslaved as it is represented to be. The writers I have alluded to give us to understand that the business of the country is done very slowly and very ill; that inventors and projectors of improvements are always treated with insolent neglect; that the Government is conducted by, and for, a few aristocratic families, whose whole public life is a constant career of personal jobs; and that judges, ministers of state, and all other officials, are in a conspiracy to defeat justice, and to shelter cruel oppressors. These are rather serious charges, which are much less true in this country, where they are freely circulated, than in several other countries where—*because* they are true, it would not be safe to publish them.

But these writers, many will say, and doubtless with truth, do not mean all, or half, of what they set forth. They only dress up their tales with exaggeration, to give them a piquancy for the entertainment of their readers; they heighten their descriptions to display their eloquence, either in the tragic or the comic vein. It is 'the fool,' according to Solomon, that 'scattereth firebrands, arrows, and death, and saith, am I not in sport?'

The direct and immediate tendency of such representations is towards revolution—such a revolution as is aimed at by that small number of persons who call themselves Chartists, or Chris-



tian Socialists. But it is probable that though such be the direct tendency of their representations, the practical effect on the minds of the greater part of the Public, is to render them incredulous as to real and remediable defects, and indifferent about really needful reforms. They understand that these over-wrought representations are merely for dramatic *effect*—that the whole is but a joke—a piece of waggery designed for present entertainment, and that there is nothing in the whole subject calling for any serious attention; but that when we have closed the book, we have only to awake as it were from a lively dream, and go about our business with a happy conviction that the whole is unreal.

To one of these writers it would be a fair retribution, and might supply a useful lesson, that he should be visited, himself, with a horrible dream. I would wish him to dream that he was a peasant under an Oriental despotism. Let him dream that he was taxed at the arbitrary will of the sovereign, and that he had to pay his taxes in kind, his produce being valued at about half the market price. Let him next dream that a great part of his land was taken from him, he receiving in return a rent of so many piastres, and the piastre being afterwards reduced to one-fourth of its original value, the nominal payment remaining the same. Let him dream that he was pressed to labour, under the lash, on some public work, at low wages, of which four-fifths were paid in food, consisting of hard, sour biscuit. Next, let him dream, that having been robbed or defrauded by a Turk, and going to a magistrate for redress, whom he was obliged to bribe to hear his cause, he found that, after all, his opponent had bribed higher; and that besides losing his cause, he was bastinadoed till he had confessed that he had brought a false charge. Then let him dream that he saw his grown-up son, on whom he had relied for the future support of the family, dragged off in chains as a conscript soldier. And lastly, let him dream that this son having deserted, and been concealed by him, both received sentence of death. On awaking, he would be inclined to doubt whether ours really is the worst possible government.

And as for those who, in Ireland, post up placards, denouncing as oppressive and persecuting every Government that



does not allow them to oppress and persecute others, and calling on all Irishmen to follow the example of the brave Sepoys—those brave Sepoys who show their valour by torturing and murdering helpless women and children, but in the battle-field are always routed by a fourth part of their number of our gallant countrymen—as for those who exhort Irishmen to follow that example, by slaughtering man, woman, and child of the Saxon race, I would wish one of them to dream that he was under the rule of a Hindu Prince, to whom he had submitted on a promise of safety and protection, and who proceeded to fulfil his promise in Oriental style, by wreaking his vengeance on him for being, though not a Saxon, at least an European, and (most unfairly) for being a Christian; unfairly, I say, since in everything but the name, he is most emphatically *un-Christian*. Let him dream that he sees his wife and daughters outraged, mutilated, and tortured to death, and his infants dashed on the pavement, while he himself is being gradually and slowly hacked to pieces by ferocious barbarians, one degree, though only one degree, less detestable than himself, inasmuch as they were brought up heathens, and do not call themselves Christians.

And when he awoke, he would probably exclaim with joy, ‘Thank God, it was but a dream! Thank God, I am under a British sovereign.’

THE END.